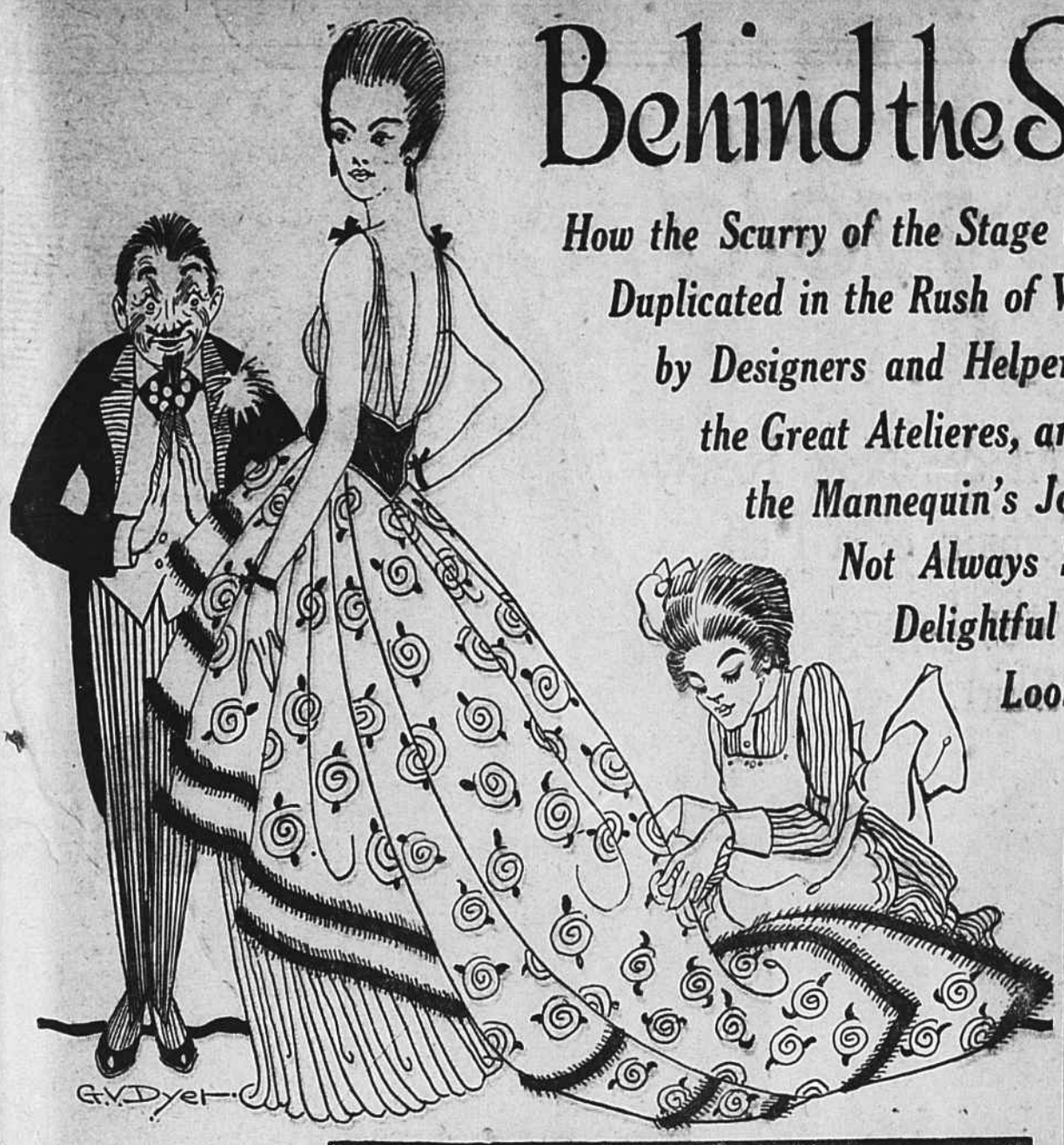
Behind the Scenes of Paris Fashion



How the Scurry of the Stage is Duplicated in the Rush of Work by Designers and Helpers in the Great Atelieres, and Why the Mannequin's Job is Not Always So Delightful as it Looks.

Typical Gallery in Which Mannequins Display New Costumes Before "Clients."

By Lucretia Chester

WHAT happens before the footlights of fashion all the world knows. Nothing is so much in the spotlight as fashion. A visitor from Mars would be likely, first of all, to become conscious of feminine apparel.

Behind the footlights is another matter. In that hall of mystery all is different, because it is the other side of the picture. And a truly fascinating other side it is!

It is speaking the truth to say that, being Parisian, there is something as distinctive, as different, behind these scenes of life as in life in the set stage before the eyes of those who are bidden to see.

If you have ever been beyond the wings at a big stage show you know what a hurrying and scurrying there is, how the principals and the chorus girls scurry to and from dressing rooms. Perhaps costumes are to be changed a dozen times, and the margin of minutes is not great. There must be expertness not only in wearing clothes, but in getting in and out of them.

Actually there is a great deal of this atmosphere in the great atelieres of Paris, where the destinies of fashion are strongly influenced, if not actually determined

A scampering of feminine feet, a fascinating swish of taffeta and lace, a swirl of gauze, a muttered exclamation in charming treble French, and one gown on a fair figure has been substituted for another.

The model who has paraded before Monsieur the Critic is ordered removed and another prescribed for its place. Mademoiselle rushes to the dressing room, reaches to remove her slippers while the "dresser" reaches here and there on her person dexterously to loosen hooks or buttons. Both work frantically to cut to the minimum the number of minutes intervening between one display and another. It is not to be doubted that the haste is not influenced by artistic pride alone. The master is a great chap for "temperament." He is petulant and enthusiastic by turns.. He laughs in delight—yes, and he has been known to weep. Everything is lovely, or everything is terrible. His helpers are angels, and they are imbeciles.

From that you may guess that the life of the mannequin is not always flowery. If the talent ordered to make or modify a design has "fallen down," the mannequin is likely to suffer some of the results of the temperamental storm that follows.

M. Paul Poiret, who is a sort of Belasco of fashion, should be credited as by no means sharing the storminess of certain other designers. He has his tempestuous moments, to be sure, but his skill of management is as evident in managing a situation as in managing a design.

It is a curious and fascinating spectacle to watch Poiret give the "touch" to a gown while the model stands and the seamstress-dresser lends her nimble help. A "So!" and "So!" and what was a half effect is a complete effect. These afterthoughts, these modifications left to the supreme moment of creative effort, are what make a gown out of the ordinary.

All this is not to say a word about the sewing women whose arduous work has given rough or finished form to the gowns that are exhibited to the critical eye that must bear the brunt of final criticism. There is an army of these women—the cleverest seamstresses Paris can find, many of them, indeed, meriting the title of artist. The really creative part of fashion-making is truly a matter of many influences from many brains and many hands.

Nor does this tell of that other hour when costumes are shown to the buyers, buyers who have, perhaps, traveled thousands of miles to see these latest creations.

This hour of display to the buyers is a lively and wearisome one for the mannequins. Even if several of the young women models have been selected to begin the display, there is always the likelihood that the buyer will particularly admire the effect that some one of them will contribute to a gown. This means that many gowns must be worn by this one mannequin, and speed again becomes an important matter—speed and cheerfulness and charm. The mannequin must look as if she were enjoying herself immensely, even when she is utterly fagged, as she so often is.

Sometimes these exhibitions last beyond all reasonable pausing times for meals. Sometimes, again, they are punctuated by delightful teas in which favored mannequins are asked to join. In fact, a mannequin drinking tea or a dainty demi tasse may furnish an admirable opportunity critically to judge the effectiveness of the costume she incidentally wears.

Taken altogether, life beyond the footlights in Paris fashion is real work. It is a business. Being a business it includes competition, and where there is competition there is demand for skill, patience, quickness, and in the case of the mannequins, beauty. Not merely beauty of face, not merely beauty of figure, but beauty of movement. A model with a flatfooted, ugly walk might be a Venus of proportions and fail. Those who ought to know say that a good walk is one of the rarest accomplishments of women.

M. Paul Poiret Fitting a New Design to a Model.

On the Left—Beginning a "Lightning Change" with the Help of Two "Dressers." Above—Finishing a Change of Costume with Dextrous Assistance.

How Modern Soldiers Are Trained to Judge Distances Correctly

MANY military experts have given it as their opinion that the training of soldiers' eyesight is the first and most important feature of musketry, and a man who is a good judge of distance is of much greater value on the battlefield than one who is a skilled shot only.

Not the least interesting are the lessons for training a soldier to see in the dark. It is impressed upon him that the ability to see in the dark increases with practice.

It is found that on open level ground a standing man in khaki can be seen on an ordinary dark night at about 12 yards, on a starlight night 24 yards, and on a moonlight night, with the moon behind the observer, 60 yards.

When the moon is behind the person looked at, the limit of vision is about 100 yards.

A column of fours moving toward the observer can be seen on an ordinary dark night at about 18 yards' distance; when starlight, at about 40 yards; with the moon behind the observer, 120 yards; and about 140 yards when the moon is behind the men looked at.

Soldiers are trained to judge distances up to 1000 yards. Eight hundred yards is fixed as the limit for the rank and file, because it is found that the most expert shots rarely hit a small target such as a prone figure at distances over 800 yards, even when the range is known.

The British standard of accuracy requires that the mean error for trained soldiers in judging distances within 800 yeards range should not exceed 100 yards. In judging distance tests, officers, non-commissioned officers and men whose error exceeds 20 per cent. are regarded as inefficient.

In Germany, according to "Notes on Visual Training," the best judges make 10 per cent. of error; in Austria the average error is 12 per cent.

In France 15 per cent. is laid down as the normal error up to 1000 yards.

In America a very practical sliding scale is in vogue, where the highest skill in shooting must be accompanied by a high standard in judging distance.

The following is a rough guide for judging lateral distances running at right angles to the observer at various distances: With one eye shut and the hand at arm's length to the front with the fingers perpendicular, the breadth of six fingers will cover 100 yards of lateral distance at a distance of 500 yards from the observer.

Under the same conditions the breadth of three fingers will cover a lateral distance of 100 yards at a distance of 1000 yards.

The breadth of two fingers will cover a lateral distance of 100 yards at 1500 yards.

The width of the thumb will roughly cover 100 yards of lateral distance 2000 yards away.

This method may be employed to indicate roughly the approximate distance of an objective from a description point. Only one hand should be used, even if more than one hand's breadth is required to indicate the distance.

The arm must be held out perfectly straight from the shoulder in front of the face, with the fingers vertical.

If, however, the object is immediately above or below the description point, the fingers should be horizontal.

In measuring distances, one eye should be closed, and both the description point and the objective kept in view.

The Strange Tree That Makes You Sneeze

THE sneeze-wood tree is a native of Natal and other parts of South Africa. Its odd name was given to it because one can not saw it without sneezing violently.

The dust of its wood has just the same effect as the strongest snuff, and is so irritating to the nose that workmen are obliged to sneeze even when they are planing it.

If a piece of wood of this tree is put in the mouth it is found to have a very bitter taste, and no doubt it is this bitterness which prevents insects of any kind from attacking the timber of the sneeze-wood tree.

The fact that insects find it so disagreeable makes its wood very valuable, for work that is required to last a long time.

Chicory, as mixed with coffee, is the dried and ground roots of a variety of endive.